

Washington, DC - Following a recent alert by the nation's leading medical research institutions on the rapid and inexplicable increase of life-threatening food allergies among newborns and children, Congressmen Tom Davis (R-VA), and Mark Kirk (R - IL), and Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D - NY) stood with concerned parents of *The Food Allergy Project* today in Washington, D.C. to support increasing federal dollars devoted to scientific research of severe food allergies in order to combat this debilitating disease and save children's lives.

They collectively looked to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the federal government's lead agency for medical research, and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), NIH's main arm for allergy research, to increase the level of research funding devoted to severe food allergies from less than \$10 million dollars per year to \$50 million per year by 2009.

David Bunning, businessman and founder of *The Food Allergy Project* with his wife Denise, a former elementary school teacher who runs a support group for more than 200 families, called on the federal government to increase the desperately required funding for the sake of millions of American children like their sons Bryan, age 12 and Daniel, age 9 who needlessly suffer from this potentially preventable or reversible condition.

David Bunning, whose sons have life-threatening allergies to milk, eggs, nuts and shellfish, said, "This is about more than one family's story. Severe food allergies affect millions of Americans. When I realized the lack of resources dedicated to this disease, I knew we had to go public. Private funding is helpful, but it's not enough. This illness has increased at such a

dramatic pace that we can't keep up without federal funding. Researchers believe that new treatments are possible within the next five to 10 years, but adequate federal funding is needed to conduct this potentially life-saving research."

Congresswoman Lowey said, "I have been advocating for this important issue for a number of years and have been an ardent fighter for the rights of food-allergic Americans. That is why I sponsored legislation, which went into effect in January 2006, that requires food products to be labeled clearly for allergens. I have also recently introduced legislation to help safeguard food allergic children in school. But Congress needs to do more. The only way to combat severe food allergies is to figure out why they are developing and how to reverse this dangerous trend. NIH needs to increase its allocation of funding to food allergy research."

Congressman Davis said, "With private support, such as that given by the Bunning family and *The Food Allergy Project*, important research is currently being done to investigate severe food allergies. But to truly attack this illness, the federal government needs to get involved and dedicate more funding to this important health issue. Leading scientists have said that we still need answers to the most basic questions crucial to understanding severe food allergies, and without increased federal dollars to ensure sustained research, new researchers

are reluctant to enter the field. We must not fail the millions of American needlessly suffering."

Congressman Kirk said, "In my district alone, there are at least five support groups for parents of severely food allergic children with up to 200 members per support group. These parents, fearing for their children's lives, are forced to be vigilant 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And it's not just my district. In schools and households across the country, more and more children are living with a condition that alienates them from their peers and severely reduces the quality of their lives."

The Food Allergy Project is a national coalition of parents, researchers, educators and experts who have come together to demand more federal resources dedicated to food allergy research, and spur the scientific studies necessary to save children's lives. Today's event follows a news conference held at Chicago's Children's Memorial Hospital last week where leading doctors and researchers joined together to alert the public to this alarming health problem.

The Food Allergy Project has supported important research at Duke University, Children's Hospital Boston/Harvard Medical School, Mt. Sinai in New York, Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago, Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, and University of Chicago Comer Children's Hospital, directly funding more than \$15 million in food allergy research.

Yet federal leadership is needed to keep pace with the alarming rate of food allergy increase.

Denise Bunning urged Congress to help food allergic children lead normal, healthy lives. "As a mother, my greatest wish is for my sons to be freed from the life-threatening burdens of this disease," she said. "Imagine fearing for your child's life every time he walks out the door. Millions of children just like mine suffer every day."

More than 11 million Americans – 4.3 million of whom are children – suffer from serious food allergies. According to a 2004 study of school nurses, there are, on average, ten children suffering from food allergies in every American elementary school. And in five short years, the

rate of peanut allergy among children doubled, a rate of increase rarely seen among non-infectious diseases.

Accidental consumption, contact or even air-borne exposure to certain foods can cause people with food allergies to react within seconds. The greatest danger is to undergo anaphylactic shock, which results in swelling of the airway, loss of blood pressure, and potential death within minutes. Such reactions are responsible for more than 150 deaths and tens of thousands of emergency room visits and hospitalizations every year.

Currently, no cure exists for food allergies. Strict avoidance of allergenic foods is the only choice, a weighty task given that the most common allergens – such as peanuts, eggs, milk and soy – are staples of our food supply and difficult to avoid completely. The sole weapon available to some in life-or-death emergencies is a shot of epinephrine – a drug which was discovered in the late 1800s. The Food Allergy Project believes that food allergic children deserve better.

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